



Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation 2023: Swiss feedback

1 Key Messages

- 1) International cooperation with like-minded countries such as Switzerland is key to strengthening education systems and providing the necessary competences for Europe in the 21st century. Cross-border exchange and cooperation in education reflects the lived reality.
- 2) Erasmus+ remains the key tool to foster internationalisation in education and needs to be further strengthened.
- 3) The European Universities Initiative (EUI) and the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) continue to foster ambitious visions for the European education systems. It is important that their outputs are shared with the whole sector.
- 4) Create more synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, while being careful with modularisation.
- 5) The participation criteria of the Erasmus+ actions should become further streamlined, notably the Partnerships for Excellence.
- 6) Erasmus+ online tools and platforms are necessary and important: their access should be broadened.
- 7) Novel programme actions (top-ups, BIPs, global opening of KA131) could be further refined.

2 Context and scope of the Swiss feedback

- Erasmus+ is an internationalisation programme for Europe and beyond, founded on the strong conviction that cross-border collaboration and exchange lead to benefits for individuals, educational institutions and Europe as a whole. Switzerland wants to contribute to this endeavour with the conviction that we are stronger together.
- Switzerland is currently not associated to the Erasmus+ programme. Defying the actual situation, many Swiss and European partners nevertheless continue to actively work together to strengthen educational experiences for all. Concretely, Swiss stakeholders maintain exchange and mobility with their European partners via the [Swiss Programme for Erasmus+](#) and participate as associated and occasionally as full partners in Erasmus+ projects. Most notably, more than 40% of all Swiss higher education institutions (HEI) are actively involved in the European University Alliances. This is a strong commitment to the European Higher Education Area. **Switzerland is a partner country in Erasmus+ since 2014 but aims to be fully associated to Erasmus+ as soon as possible.**
- This paper, prepared in autumn 2023, is based on feedback of education stakeholders in Switzerland, notably the Swiss Agency for Exchange and Mobility (National Agency) Movetia and Swiss higher education institutions (HEI). In addition, national and cantonal authorities commented on the report.

3 Recommendations to make Erasmus+ stronger

3.1 Effectiveness

3.1.1 International cooperation with like-minded countries is key to strengthening education systems and reflects the lived reality of cross-border exchange.

- Europe is one of the most connected and borderless continents in the world. This achievement across societies has made life for European citizens easier and more peaceful. Erasmus+ fosters and reflects this lived reality. Exchanging, working, and traveling across borders fully applies to Switzerland and the neighbouring EU countries, as it is an integral part of the Schengen area and the free movement of people applies. Therefore, **joining Erasmus+ would be reflecting the lived reality of many European citizens in the border regions and beyond, based on common values such as diversity, democratic life, freedom,** and the protection of the environment. Erasmus+ brings citizens together in fostering these values and cross-border exchanges that are lived by so many individuals on a daily basis.
- In a world where skilled workers are essential and rare at the same time, fostering skills and competence development becomes very important. Education systems have to provide these skills while adjusting to changing circumstances of digitalisation, the transition to a green economy and demographic changes. Therefore, the quality development of schools and other educational institutions is essential and Erasmus+ a main instrument to support this.

- There is ample evidence that exchange and mobility lead to the development of transversal competences that are relevant for the challenges of the 21st century and future employability (intercultural communication, digital and media literacy, resilience, language skills, learning to learn). The quality development of education systems is further fostered through the cross-border cooperation between educational institutions. Erasmus+ supports both aspects with the Key Actions 1 and 2. **This basic structure of the programme and its main mission should be maintained and further strengthened.**
- **The association of Switzerland to Erasmus+ has been a goal of the Swiss Federal Council for more than 10 years. This position is a strong and positive political sign for a tight relationship between the EU and Switzerland and a constructive step forward.** The Swiss government, the parliament, the universities, the Cantons (Swiss regions), the students unions, the national youth council and others are all in favour of an association of Switzerland to the Erasmus+ programme, current and future.

3.2 Relevance

3.2.1 Erasmus+ remains the key tool to foster internationalisation in education and needs to be strengthened.

- Erasmus+ is colloquially equated to internationalisation in education. This shows that the programme remains the key tool to foster European collaboration and internationalisation in all types of educational organisations. **The programme should be accompanied by a strong vision and ambitious objectives.** Learning mobility should become a norm and not the exception, for example by integrating mobility windows in all educational pathways. **In Switzerland the national government together with the Cantons have agreed on the [vision](#) that every learner as part of their education should have at least one mobility experience.** While this is a long-term vision, it gives a strong signal to school and university leaders to make commitments towards that endeavour.
- Furthermore, Erasmus+ is also a tool to move forward with the realisation of the European Higher Education Area, financing pilots on a European Degree for example. **Switzerland is an integral part of the Bologna process and close cooperation in this regard is beneficial for all.**
- The context of the revised and increased mobility targets of the draft Council Recommendation on learning mobility ([Europe on the Move](#)) requires further funding for the core mission of Erasmus+ to satisfy the growing demand for mobility and to make the European Education Area a true reality.

3.2.2 The European Universities Initiative (EUI) and the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) continue to foster ambitious visions for the European education systems. It is important that their outputs are shared with the whole sector.

- The introduction of the European Universities Initiative (EUI), the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies herald a new period for European collaboration in education. While the initiatives are not perfect and still relatively young, they undoubtedly brought new momentum for deep transnational cooperation into European education. The initiatives carry further weight as they raise the profile of strategic transnational cooperation in education in Europe and as they have an impact on policy making, especially when it comes to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and removing barriers to transnational cooperation and mobility. For all these reasons, the Swiss public authorities and the Swiss higher education institutions (HEI) welcomed the European Universities Initiative.
- **Using the possibility for HEIs to join the EUI alliances as associated partners was a resounding success. After the 2022 and the 2023 calls, there are now about 40% of all Swiss HEIs involved in the alliances**, supported by funding from the Swiss government and self-funding. Through this engagement the universities and universities of applied sciences benefit and contribute strongly to the future of the European education systems and the Bologna process. They are therefore equally interested in the sustainability and the long-term development of the European University Initiative.
- Currently not associated to Erasmus+, the Swiss government is committed to support the participation of Swiss higher education institutions in the European university alliances. The creation of inter-university campuses and seamless mobility spaces can only be truly successful if it includes all countries in the European Higher Education Area. As many Swiss HEIs are now members of the alliances, Switzerland would be well positioned to be swiftly associated to Erasmus+ to continue to contribute even more to the initiative.
- **Lastly, the investment in the EUI should not come at the detriment of existing tools of transnational cooperation, such as Erasmus Mundus, nor should it take away or compromise the growth of the learning mobility budgets.** The EUI should be fully complimentary to existing tools and mobility support.
- In Switzerland, the national agency for mobility and exchange, Movetia, is in charge of implementing the Swiss programme for Erasmus+. Movetia has gathered valuable experience in informing and advising on the EUI and CoVE actions. This experience was very positive and could be useful for Erasmus+ in harnessing the role of NAs to improve information and promotion of the centralised Erasmus+ actions.

3.3 Coherence

Create more synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, while being careful with modularisation.

- Despite the repeated emphasis on synergies between education, research and innovation funding, the funding programmes Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and others, remain to a large part siloed. The application processes and call criteria could be brought closer together between Erasmus+ and Horizon, which would make it easier for beneficiaries interested in both programmes to navigate them.
- Moreover, synergies not only apply on programme level but also on the level of the participating institutions. Concretely, especially in higher education institutions the advisory services should be better aware of all the relevant offers of the two programmes and better understand complementarities rather than competition, for example Erasmus+ staff mobility can be relevant for academic staff and researchers.
- Modularisation of future programmes is being discussed. This could for example lead to modular project proposals that consist of different chapters for the same project, whereby each chapter relates to a different EU programme (e.g. Erasmus+ and Horizon for European University Alliances). Such **modular approaches should always take into account that countries that are not EU members are usually only associated to a number of programmes (research and education programmes for example), but do not have access to others (such as ESF+ or ERDF for example).**

3.4 Efficiency and simplification

3.4.1 The participation criteria of the Erasmus+ actions should be more streamlined, notably the Partnerships for Excellence.

- The simplification of Erasmus+ is a frequently made point, but how to do it concretely remains vague. One possibility would be to **further streamline the criteria and participation conditions of the different actions within Erasmus+**, especially since there are new actions added over the years. This growing number of actions becomes more difficult to comprehend and leads to some being little known. For example, according to the ESN survey only 7% of respondents are aware of the Blended Intensive Programmes.
- Reducing the number of actions would be one possibility, but an easier approach would be to simplify and streamline some of the Erasmus+ actions so that there are easier to understand. In the chapter on Partnerships for Excellence there is for example an incoherence between the participation conditions. The chapter includes the Erasmus Mundus action, the Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVE), the European Universities Initiative (EUI), and the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies. All these actions allow for the participation of educational actors from Erasmus+ partner countries as self-funded 'associated partners', in some cases (CoVE, Erasmus Mundus) even as full partners if significant added value can be demonstrated. However, neither of these cases are possible for the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies. **Allowing to have 'associated partner' from Erasmus+ partner countries in the Erasmus Teacher Academies would strengthen the action and increase the consistency and coherence of the programme.**

3.4.2 Erasmus+ online tools and platforms are necessary and important, but their access should be broadened.

- The Erasmus+ online tools and platforms are aimed at making the use of the programme simpler and the mobility experiences smoother for all. These tools are manifold and are used to publish Erasmus+ calls, submit proposals, find project partners, exchange and find information on learning mobility and more.
- While these tools are constantly being improved, they should also become **more open to be used by all education stakeholders** that are concerned with Erasmus+ projects. Actions funded from the external budget line enable mobility and cooperation with partners from third countries not associated to the programme. Similarly, KA131 mobility in higher education and VET is possible to countries outside of Erasmus+ too. Furthermore, many actions in other parts of the programme, such as the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE), target and welcome partners from non-associated countries around the world. **Opening access to all the supporting tools and platforms, such as the e-twinning platform or the Erasmus App for example, would strengthen the Erasmus+ programme as a whole and increase efficiency.** This wider access would support and further facilitate the collaboration between Erasmus+ programme countries and their partners from Erasmus+ partner countries.

3.4.3 Novel programme actions (top-ups, BIPs, global opening of KA131) could be further refined.

- The grant system is continuously evolving. New elements, as for example the top-ups for green travel or inclusion support, are helpful to focus on the main challenges of the Erasmus+ programme. However, these novelties always have to be balanced with improving and increasing the mobility offers – increasing grants per mobile person could come at the detriment of higher mobility numbers. While inclusion top-ups enable the participation of disadvantaged young people, the **focus should remain on communication efforts and reaching out to learners who are not aware of the Erasmus+ possibilities or not convinced that it offers opportunities for them.**
- Furthermore, Switzerland welcomes **the international opening of KA131** to use up to 20% of the mobility budgets for outgoing mobility to third countries not associated to the programme. This additional possibility for sending institutions **strengthens the collaboration with European and global partners outside of Erasmus+.**
- Another interesting novelty in the current programme are the Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP). **BIPs are a useful addition to the programme that does not replace physical with virtual mobility but expands the possibilities in a complementary way.** Given that the BIPs are frequently used by European Universities, the minimum number of students required to be enrolled in a BIP (currently set at 10 Erasmus+ funded students), could be rendered more flexible by counting all students from participating higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area (Bologna process). This would make the action even more integrated and coherent with the EUI.